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The WINGS emergency shelter for women and children in Rolling Meadows has been open for more than a year.

But the safe house is only operating at half-capacity — and has been since it opened in January 2005.

The facility's capacity is 45 per day, and it has had about 15 to 20, Executive Director Rebecca Darr said.

She said the agency — Women in Need Growing Stronger — had to dip into its cash reserves to help cover construction costs for the project because the state of Illinois has not come through with a grant that had been promised.

So, WINGS scrambled to get some money to operate the facility, and U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk, a Highland Park Republican, was able to obtain a \$200,000 grant from the Department of Justice.

"We basically talked to him and said we really need some help," Darr said.

She said the agency will not receive the money until July, but it is one-fifth of the \$1 million it hopes to raise this year so it can open at full capacity.

WINGS will continue trying to raise \$1 million annually to keep the safe house up to speed, Darr said.

The money primarily covers staffing, so the women and children who come to the shelter get the care they need after whatever traumatic situation they experienced before arriving at the shelter, she said.

"They're trying to figure out where to go next," Darr said, adding the agency provides counseling, financial and legal help, and housing.

She said the shelter has to turn people away right now.

Some who call just need counseling, or legal or financial help, so they are connected with agencies who provide those services, Darr said. If they need emergency shelter, they are referred to shelters in Elgin, DuPage County, Waukegan or Evanston, depending on which is closer.

Darr said the \$1 million will not cover administrative or fundraising costs, which are covered by sales from the WINGS resale shop. The fundraising drive includes a dinner in April, and seeking donations from area businesses.

Darr said there was a need for this type of facility in the area, but now WINGS has to find a way to keep it running.

"We got all kinds of calls from women seeking emergency shelter and wondering why that wasn't available," she said. "I think folks just think, 'The building's there and it will run by itself,' and it won't."

Kirk said the money was available in part because of the Violence Against Women Act.

"If we can get a mother and her child into a safe place, the likelihood of a violent crime being committed is reduced," Kirk said. "Instead of being locked in a home with an abuser, they have a place to go."

Kirk said safe houses are vital because there are more than 20,000 women who are in abusive situations in northern Illinois.

"I think late on a Saturday night when a mother is being abused and her children are crying, it doesn't matter what other government programs are out there — she needs a program that will provide immediate help," he said.